

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, NL
SUBJECT: CDA WINS NETHERLANDS PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

REF: THE HAGUE 1537

1. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (CDA) WON THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS MARCH 29 WHILE THE GOVERNMENT COALITION PARTNER LIBERAL PARTY (VVD) TOOK SOME LOSSES. LABOR PARTY (PVDA) NEARLY MAINTAINED ITS MARKEDLY IMPROVED ELECTORAL POSITION RESULTING FROM MAY 1977 NATIONAL ELECTIONS. DEMOCRATS '66 (D'66) REMAINED RELATIVELY STABLE. SMALLER PARTIES SUFFERED SERIOUS LOSSES; THE COMMUNISTS (CPN) DID EVEN WORSE THAN IN 1977. VOTER TURNOUT WAS HIGH FOR PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS (79 PERCENT) BUT LESS THAN THAT FOR 1977 NATIONAL ELECTIONS (87 PERCENT).

2. THE ELECTIONS WERE HELD TO CHOOSE PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP. PROVINCES NORMALLY DEAL WITH MATTERS SUCH AS HIGHWAY BUILDING AND LAND DRAINAGE. YET THE CAMPAIGNS WERE WAGED MAINLY ON THE BASIS OF NATIONAL ISSUES. IF RESULTS ARE READ IN TERMS OF SEATS WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN WON HAD THIS BEEN A PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEY LOOK AS FOLLOWS:

	PERCENT	SEATS (1978)	SEATS (1977)
CDA	35.10	54 (GAIN 5)	49
PVDA	33.93	52 (LOSS 1)	53
VVD	16.95	26 (LOSS 2)	28
D'66	5.17	8	8

CPN 1.55 2 2

NOTE: THE ELECTIONS HAVE NO EFFECT ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE SECOND CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND ONLY AN INDIRECT EFFECT ON THE FIRST CHAMBER.

3. THE LARGER POLITICAL PARTIES WERE STRENGTHENED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE SMALLER PARTIES, JUST AS HAPPENED IN THE 1977 NATIONAL ELECTIONS. ELECTIONS IN 1977 REVERSED THE TREND OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC LOSSES IN RECENT YEARS. THE CDA SHOWING THIS TIME CONTINUES THIS TREND. SOME VOTES WHICH WENT TO THE VVD IN 1977 AS A PROTEST AGAINST THE SOCIALISTS PROBABLY RETURNED TO THE CDA THIS TIME. SMALL VVD LOSSES ALSO MAY HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY ITS LACK OF A CLEAR, SEPARATE IDENTITY NOW THAT IT SITS IN THE CABINET AND NOT IN THE OPPOSITION AS IN 1977.

4. BECAUSE MAJOR PARTIES HAVE TREATED THE ELECTION AS A TEST OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE CABINET, VAN AGT AND CDA CAN RIGHTLY CLAIM VICTORY. IT WAS A BADLY NEEDED PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY AS WELL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WAS FORCED TO DEAL WITH DIVISIVE ISSUES EARLY ON. THE FLUSH OF CDA VICTORY MUST BE TEMPERED, HOWEVER. THE PVDA WON MORE VOTES THAN AT ANY PREVIOUS PROVINCIAL ELECTION AND CAME CLOSE TO MAINTAINING ITS POWERFUL POSITION GAINED IN 1977. IT CLEARLY CONTINUES TO HAVE WIDE POPULAR APPEAL; A HIGHER VOTER TURNOUT AS WOULD BE EXPECTED FOR A NATIONAL ELECTION MIGHT WELL HAVE PRODUCED FIRST PLACE FOR THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LABOR PARTY.

5. FOR THE GOVERNMENT, ALL WILL NOT BE SMOOTH SAILING. MEMBERS OF CDA PARLIAMENTARY FACTION UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF FLOOR LEADER AANTJES WILL PROBABLY FEEL ENCOURAGED TO EXERT THEIR POLITICAL WEIGHT OVER THE VVD FACTION MORE THAN BEFORE, SINCE CDA HAS GAINED AT VVD EXPENSE. ALTHOUGH MOST PARTY LEADERS ARE NOW SPEAKING OF INCREASED GOVERNMENT UNITY, THE BASIC CAUSES OF POLICY SPLITS BETWEEN THE COALITION'S FACTIONS IN PARLIAMENT REMAIN. THE CONTINUING ISSUES OF ERW AND URENCO MAY TURN OUT TO BE ONLY THE BEGINNING OF CABINET PROBLEMS. MAJOR POTENTIAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CDA AND VVD LIE IN THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC SECTOR AND REMAIN TO BE ADDRESSED WHEN THE GOVERNMENT MAKES ITS SPENDING PROPOSALS KNOWN BY JUNE. IN THE MEANTIME, THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO PUT FORWARD ITS PROPOSALS ON SUCH ITEMS AS THE EXCESS PROFITS SHARING LEGISLATION (VAD). IN SO DOING IT MAY SHOW A CLEARER POLICY DIRECTION, SOMETHING WHICH IT AVOIDED PRIOR TO ELECTIONS.

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